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## OVERCROWDED PORTO RICO

The Hon. Arthur Yager, Governor of Porto Rico, in a paper on the "Fundamental Social and Political Problems of Porto Rico," read at the Lake Mohonk Conference, October 22 last, gave a most suggestive and informing discussion of serious problems involving the well-being of the Porto Ricans. Probably few of our citizens have realized that the island is one of the most densely peopled parts of the earth and that food requirements bid fair to outstrip the local means of supply. In many other respects Porto Rico exhibits characteristics peculiar to island geography. Governor Yager said there is much wretchedness and poverty among the masses of the people. Their dwellings are, for the most part, mere hovels, almost devoid of furniture and crowded beyond belief. Their food consists of rice, codfish, and beans, supplemented by the native fruits. Their wages are, as a rule, barely sufficient to maintain their existence. These conditions have prevailed in Porto Rico for many years, and, while much has been done to improve and build up the island since the American occupation, it has not been possible to make any very marked improvement. The fundamental cause is the dense population, now conservatively estimated at 1,200,000 people. It was 1,118,000 in 1910, according to the official census, and it has been steadily increasing since that date.

The gross area of the island, land and water, including the small adjacent and dependent islands, is 3,435 square miles, and the present population therefore is nearly 350 to the square mile. This is a greater density than that of China proper (200 to the square mile in 1910) or of India (175) or of Japan (362). It is more than ten times greater than that of the United States proper (30.9) and over three times as great as that of New England (105.7). In fact there are only two states in the American Union that have more people per square mile, viz., Massachusetts (419) and Rhode Island (509), and in these states about three-fourths of the people live in cities and depend upon manufactures, while in Porto Rico only about 10 per cent of the people live in cities of more than 10,000 population and there are almost no manufactures. In short, if we consider both the area and the industrial development of this little island there is perhaps no region in the world, save Java, more densely populated.

The island is about four-fifths mountainous, much of it so steep that it can hardly be cultivated, and yet this great population is so evenly distributed over its whole surface that the center of population is only about 5 miles in a straight line from the geographical center of Porto Rico. Moreover, the population has been produced by the natural increase of the people of the island. There is practically no immigration and, according to the census of 1910, only about one per cent of the people are of foreign birth.

Furthermore, the population is still steadily increasing. The first census, taken by the Americans in 1899, enumerated in round numbers 953,000 persons in Porto Rico. At the present time they exceed that number by 250,000. By comparison with the census taken by the Spanish government in 1887, which enumerated 732,000, we find that in the twenty-two years immediately preceding the coming of the Americans there was an increase of 221,000 people, or about 30 per cent, while in the sixteen years since the American annexation there has been an increase of 250,000, or about 27 per cent. To put it another way, during the latter part of the Spanish period, the average annual increase was about 1.3 per cent, while during the whole of the American period, it has been 1.6 per cent. The increase last year, according to the official reports of births and deaths, was 24,000, or 2 per cent, of the whole population. This rapid increase in population has been made possible by the commercial expansion and industrial development that has followed the American occupation. This expansion is made evident by the following figures:

The production and export of coffee remain at about the same figure as in Spanish

times. The output of the sugar industry has been multiplied by six, going up from 50,000-60,000 tons in Spanish times to about 350,000 tons at present. The export of tobacco, cigars, etc., has been increased more than ninefold, rising in value from about \$1,000,000 in Spanish times to about \$9,250,000 at present. The fruit industry has been created and developed entirely by the Americans, the exports, during the past year, reaching a total of about \$4,500,000. The enormous increase in the exports of the whole island may be further illustrated by comparing the figures for 1901, which show total exports of slightly more than \$8,500,000, with those of the present, which are about \$49,330,000.

Gov. Yager added: "This large expansion of commerce has enlarged greatly the opportunities for employment among the laboring population. Instead, however, of raising the standard of living and increasing the wages of agricultural workers in any marked degree, it has resulted chiefly in a large increase of their numbers. The conclusion seems to be that Porto Rico has reached that painful stage in its economic development where the natural increase in its population has outrun the means of employment and where the standard of living has consequently been pressed down to the lowest limit.

"The people of Porto Rico are a kindly, charitable, lovable people; their patriotic love of their island home is worthy of all praise. The devotion of parents to their children, especially of the mothers to their offspring, is equal to that shown among the people of any land. But, owing to their inherited improvidence, their racial characteristics, and perhaps to the tropical climate, those checks upon population which in colder climates seem adequate to keep the increase of the people well within the limits of subsistence seem to be lacking among them. The birth rate seems to bear no relation whatever to the conditions of industry and the opportunities for employment.

"I call attention to this problem because it seems to me that those of us who are responsible for the future of the island should face it now. In my judgment it is not only important but it is urgent. With the population already pressing hard upon the means of employment, if any unexpected calamity should befall any of the island's industries there would result more serious suffering among the laboring people than the insular government could possibly relieve, with the means at its command. If, for example, a cyclone should devastate the coffee plantations, as actually happened in 1899, the situation might become very critical. Or if, as now seems certain, the protective duty on sugar should be abolished, and the decline of that great industry, which everybody predicts, should actually take place, the problem of feeding the unemployed would soon become most serious.

"What, therefore, should be done to meet and forestall the coming of even worse conditions than now exist? I do not hesitate to express my belief that the only really effective remedy is the transfer of large numbers of Porto Ricans to some other region. I do not believe that there is in history any instance of a country that has reached the overcrowded condition in which Porto Rico now stands, that ever escaped from it without the aid of emigration. Whatever can be done in other ways to improve conditions should still be done, but those things alone will not solve the problem.

"At present there seems to be only one country that lies hopefully open to a movement of Porto Ricans out of their own island, and that is Santo Domingo. Many have gone there in spite of the dangers due to the unstable political conditions. Santo Domingo is only about eighty miles from Porto Rico. It is almost identical in climate, physical characteristics, products, people, and language. On this account there would be little shock in change of residence. It has now only about thirty people to the square mile. Vast stretches of fertile virgin soil await labor, and the two islands could be made to fit together like hand and glove.

"I believe it to be the duty of the United States to make, if possible, such arrangements as may accomplish the purpose that these two neighboring islands, over which the American government has assumed complete or partial control, should supplement each other's needs with respect to population and social development. . . . Treaty arrangements might be entered into between the governments of the United States and Santo Domingo which would include a practical scheme of emigration under governmental encouragement and aid of the surplus population of the smaller island to the unoccupied lands of the larger. In this way the greatest problem of both islands would be solved through the redistribution of population. That there would arise some complications and practical difficulties in carrying out this scheme is doubtless true, but that it is feasible and practicable if undertaken earnestly, I have no doubt. That it is within the power and rights of the American Government in view of its responsibilities in both of these islands as well as in the Caribbean Sea generally seems to be clear, and that it would meet general approval among the people of both islands seems highly probable."